Indian and Northern Affairs Canada | Affaires indiennes et du Nord Canada

NWT Plain Talk

On Land and Self-government

Summer 2004

The traditional arts and crafts of the Aboriginal people of the Northwest Territories reflect a way of life that has been passed down through generations. Elder Marie Agnes Bonnetrouge of Fort Simpson is seen here beading uppers for moccasins, a traditional art which requires an attentive eye and hours of skilled work. The preservation of values, culture and heritage is an integral part of land and self-government negotiations across the NWT.

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School of Community Government

Building capacity for a changing territory

Plain Talk usually features stories and updates on land and self-government agreements in the Northwest Territories. While these negotiations, and the agreements they produce, are critical to the future of the territory, they are just some of the many building blocks being put in place to support the political, social and economic development of the NWT.

Through land and self-government agreements, Aboriginal people are able to manage their lands and resources and implement their vision of government. To make that vision a reality on the ground, it will take hundreds of people with specialized skills and training in everything from land and water management, to finance and administration.

The governments that are recognized through these agreements will no doubt do things differently. However, many of the roles and responsibilities they will have are quite similar to those of employees and decision-makers in any community. They will often require specific skills and specialized training.

That's where the School of Community Government comes in. Since 1999, the School has been developing and delivering home grown training for NWT communities. Whether it's a workshop series to help community leaders make better decisions or a series of courses for staff in technical areas such as finance and community works, the School's programs are designed to build on existing local capacity. A goal of the School is to increase a community's ability to shape it's own future by training and certifying community staff.

> ***"You can bring a lot of these skills back to your workplace. A lot of the stuff I learned, I utilize on the job in areas like informatics and human resources."***
>
> **Elizabeth Ann McKay**

Elizabeth Ann McKay works with the Housing Authority in Fort Resolution. She is the School's first graduate in the Community Management Program. She recently completed 16 modules over the course of about two-and-a-half years and is a strong supporter of the program. "I had been doing a lot of the stuff in my job already, but I wasn't certified in the management field. I thought it would be a good opportunity to be certified," she says. "You can bring a lot of these skills back to your workplace. A lot of the stuff I learned, I utilize on the job in areas like informatics and human resources."

McKay is not alone. In fact, satisfaction levels with the course instruction provided at the School of Community Government are consistently high. In the 2003/04 school year, 96% of students evaluated the course instruction as "good" or "very good".

Since 1999, the School has offered courses in the areas of political development and leadership, community management, finance, land administration, works and works management, public safety and fire protection. It has also branched out into areas of demand.

"We've expanded because we see ourselves as a cutting-edge organization

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The purpose of our newsletter is to keep you informed on the progress of land and self-government negotiations in the Northwest Territories, and to provide some answers to frequently asked questions. We also feature the people and communities involved in negotiations, celebrate milestones, and announce upcoming events. On behalf of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND), we hope you will find our newsletter informative and easy to read.

Measuring up

School of Community Government offers Occupational Standards and Certification

When a community government or organization hires new staff, they may wonder if the person has the knowledge and skills that are needed. On the other hand, employees often find it difficult to have the skills, knowledge and experience they do have recognized.

The Occupational Standards and Certification offered through the School of Community Government can help solve these problems by providing a clear path to develop and recognize the skills needed in key community government positions.

Through Occupational Standards and Certification, community government staff who can show they are competent in certain occupations can have their knowledge tested against an industry performance standard and be awarded a Certificate of Competency from the NWT's Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

To be certified, an individual must have a set amount of experience in the position, usually two to three years. They can then complete a series of steps to evaluate their knowledge and skills before they are certified. If they find they need more training to meet the standard, the necessary courses are available through the School of Community Government.

"Because Occupational Certification is relatively new, our biggest challenge is getting people to know about, and understand the standards and certification program," says Dave Earle, Support Services Officer with the School.

So far, Occupational Certification is available for the following occupations:

- Senior Administrative Officer
- Band Manager (First Nations Administrator)
- Housing Manager
- Assistant Housing Manager
- Finance Officer
- Tenant Relations Officer

Occupational Standards have been developed for the positions below and certification will soon be available for those marked with a (*).

- Recreation Coordinator *
- Recreation Facility Operator *
- Community Works Foreman *
- Economic Development Officer
- Information Technologist
- Lands Administrator

Made-in-the-NWT training

A program for community government administrative assistants

The course list at the School of Community Government is growing all the time. One of the most recent additions is a program to address the needs of the men and women who keep community governments offices running: clerks, receptionists, office managers and other administrative staff.

"We carried out a needs assessment, looked at all the different jobs in community governments and saw that there was a significant number of people in office administration roles who wanted and required training," says Sharon Morrison. Morrison is a long time Northerner who manages the Community Government Administrative Assistant program now being offered by the School of Community Government.

"The program is customized specifically for community government offices and was designed with the assistance of community government staff," she explains.

Elizabeth Ann McKay, Arctic of Housing Manager for the Fort Mackenzie Housing Authority, and Jen McLaughlan from the School of Community Government's Community Management Program, in the Capital's Executive Boardroom. Elizabeth is taking part in the Executive Housing Association's Community Management Program.

Morrison says this program was designed with the realities of northern community governments and Aboriginal organizations in mind. "These people are generalists who do a bit of everything in their offices; that's not training they would necessarily get in a standard office training program."

> ***"Learning new information about office procedures and the participant exchange of best practices is a powerful combination that greatly enriches the learning experience for everyone."***
>
> Sharon Morrison

To complete the training and get their certificate, participants will need to complete six 45-hour course modules that will cover everything from office systems and computer skills, to business communications and bookkeeping.

Morrison, who is trained as an adult educator, feels strongly about keeping the program as hands-on as possible. "The hands-on teaching approach includes some theory, but much of the learning experience involves application and use of actual community government office systems," she says. She has just packed up a box of teaching materials for her first class in Inuvik and she pulls out a few teaching tools that will be introduced to students. They include address locator systems, a complete filing system, a mail recording system, and a variety of bring-forward systems. These are models of procedures and systems administrative assistants use every day to keep routine office communications organized.

"When developing the program, we constantly focussed on the role of the administrative assistant and the structure of the community government organization. The community governments benefit by having more effective staff who are trained and feel confident in their jobs. The employees themselves grow and feel they are contributing to their overall professional development and the goals of their organization," Morrison says.

But it's not just the organizations and students who benefit. Morrison says she will learn from the participants, too. "We provide the instruction and the format for participants to exchange ideas and best practices based on their experience in community government organizations. Learning new information about office procedures and the participant exchange of best practices is a powerful combination that greatly enriches the learning experience for everyone."

Addressing needs of community governments

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addressing community needs and priorities, looking to the next stage, to the future of the NWT and the changing make-up of the territory. It's nice to address change," says Penny Johnson, a senior researcher with the School.

For example, the School is working with partners to develop governance training for Aboriginal organizations and to address the emerging needs of self-government. The School has worked with the federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) and other partners to develop Occupational Standards and Certification for Band Managers and Financial Officers. They have also launched a 12-module Governance training program.

"I see good things coming out of this initiative. It's very grassroots and basic, which is what I think we should be focusing on to build stronger government systems in our communities," says Graham Baptiste, a Funding Services Officer at DIAND who has been involved with the Governance training for the past two years.

Baptiste points out that the training is not just for band councils. It is also being used by the Aboriginal corporations that manage land owned by Aboriginal groups as a result of a land claim negotiation. As Aboriginal groups in the NWT complete self-government agreements, the School can also work with them to build the capacity they need for their new government structures. He says participants don't just benefit from the training, they learn from each other by networking, sharing their successes and talking about what has worked for them.

"We are very different from an institutionalized college setting. What we offer is very specific to community and Aboriginal government realities," says Johnson. "We offer a training opportunity that doesn't otherwise exist."

Since it opened, the School has offered over 370 courses to more than 3,000 participants from community governments, Aboriginal organizations and other organizations across the NWT. Enrollment rates have risen steadily over the years, from 100 students in 1999/2000, to 887 students this past year.

The School of Community Government is part of the GNWT's Department of Municipal and Community Affairs. It delivers programs in partnership with a variety of other organizations, including other GNWT departments, the federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the NWT Housing Corporation, Aboriginal organizations, community governments and professional associations.

To find out more, you can call **873-7919** in Yellowknife, or **toll free at 1-877-531-9194**. You can also visit the School's website at **www.sofcg.org**.

Participants in a road maintenance course offered recently by the School of Community Government's Works and Works Management program.

When negotiations go on the road

Land and self-government negotiations bring an interesting mix of people together. In the NWT, negotiations normally involve three parties: the federal government, the territorial government and the Aboriginal group.

The signing of a final agreement usually gets the most attention, but that event is the result of years of work. From the outside, negotiations may seem to move slowly, but what people don't always see are the many small steps it takes to make the pieces of a final agreement fall into place.

Much of this work gets done during negotiation sessions, when the negotiators for the three parties sit down over several days to reach agreement on the principles and the language that will form the final agreement.

These negotiation sessions usually happen once a month over the course of several years. During the life of a negotiation, this can amount to literally hundreds of days of meetings in communities across the NWT and elsewhere in Canada. It also means the negotiation teams spend thousands of hours "on the road" getting to and from negotiations.

Often, travelling to a region of the NWT is an education in itself for people coming from Ottawa or Yellowknife. Negotiating teams get to see first hand the challenges that people in the region face on a daily basis. Planes need to be chartered, ice roads are subject to freeze-up and break-up, accommodations are limited, the weather is unpredictable and services we take for granted in larger centers are not always easy to access.

At a Beaufort-Delta Self-Government negotiation session in Tuktoyaktuk this year, a blizzard swept in, closing the ice road and leaving the negotiations teams "stuck in Tuk". To most people down south, that would be quite frustrating, but to residents of Tuk, it's just a part of life.

Sharing sleeping quarters and washrooms is common for the visiting negotiating teams when they are in small communities. Although it is less convenient than your standard hotel, it builds a sense of camaraderie that one wouldn't normally expect to see in a negotiation situation. In NWT communities, the people sitting across from you at the negotiation table hashing out tough issues during the day are the same people you will be sitting across from at the dinner table that night.

This is the human side of a negotiator's job that people do not normally see. Despite the hours they spend discussing technical issues, such as "fiscal financing arrangements" and "surface and sub-surface rights", their experiences go beyond the negotiation table and are not so far removed from the realities of everyday life in the communities.

Negotiators can relate to driving on ice roads and questioning whether the "open" sign is accurate or not. They have experienced that uneasy feeling at hearing that a blizzard is expected to arrive the same time their flight is scheduled to depart. They too have seen the indescribable beauty of the land and experienced the easy hospitality of the people in the communities at the centre of negotiations. It all contributes to their understanding of the importance of what it is they are negotiating and how the agreements they reach will affect the people and communities of the NWT.

Just plain fun!

If you read *Plain Talk* regularly, you've probably learned a few things about land and self-government negotiations and other interesting NWT facts. At *Plain Talk*, we know there is always more to learn, so we've put together a little game to test your knowledge. It will also give you a taste of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development's Youthbuzz website. In fact, you'll have to go to that site to check your answers to the questions. It's easy, just go to "Fun & Games" at http://nwt-tno.inac-ainc.gc.ca/youthbuzz and see how you did.

1. What is a Land Claim?
2. The traditional name for Fort Simpson is Lidlii Kue. What does it mean?
3. Name the two very important historical treaties that were signed between the Government of Canada and the First Nations in the NWT?
4. What two kinds of boats did the Inuvialuit use for hunting and transportation?
5. How many square kilometres is the NWT?
6. Great Slave Lake is the second largest lake in Canada. How many swimming pools can the water in it fill?
7. What is the population of the Northwest Territories?
8. Name the main four ingredients used to make bannock?

In fact, if you get all the right answers to all eight questions, you could win a prize. Just send us your answers by email by going to the "Contact Us" section of the Youthbuzz website http://nwt-tno.inac-ainc.gc.ca/youthbuzz . Good luck!

You were asking...

Q. Why are there Treaty Days each summer and why does Canada continue to make Treaty Payments of five dollars to each First Nation person in the NWT?

A. "Treaty Days" stem from two historical treaties that were signed between First Nations and the Crown in the NWT. Treaty 8 was signed during the summers of 1899 and 1900, and Treaty 11 was signed in the summer of 1921. Each year since then, around the same time as the original treaties were signed, "Treaty Days" are held. This annual celebration shows respect and recognition of the treaties and the special relationship that exists between First Nations people and the Government of Canada. It is the tradition at these events that First Nation members receive an annual cash payment from the Government of Canada. The amount of the payment is the same amount received when the Treaty was signed. For Treaty 8 and 11, each person receives five dollars.

Do you have a question about land or self-government negotiations in the NWT? We'd be happy to provide an answer. Contact us at the address listed below.

OUR VISION

The NWT region of DIAND is a respected partner in a strong and healthy Northwest Territories.

We strive for:

- respectful, effective relationships with Aboriginal people;
- creating and enhancing opportunities for all Northerners;
- responsible resource development in healthy ecosystems;
- northern control over northern resources;
- responsive and accountable northern government as partners; and
- national initiatives that reflect the interests of all Northerners.

On the web

Visit the following for more information:

Government of Canada programs and services
Government of Canada site:
www.gc.ca

DIAND
Northwest Territories Region site:
www.nwt-tno.inac-ainc.gc.ca

Agreements
Indian and Northern Affairs Canada site:
www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/agr/index_e.html

Plain Talk *on the web*
Indian and Northern Affairs Canada site:
www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/nt/pt/index_e.html

Here's who to contact:

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Plain Talk on Land and Self-government is produced by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development in the NWT to help northerners understand these concepts, how they work, and what they mean in our day-to-day lives. It is not a legal document.